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NEWS TRAIL

When women turn targets of hate politics

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The Bulli Bai app incident in which images of prominent Muslim women were uploaded for 'auction', is enough indication that the politics of hate is fast poisoning our society.

By Abhay Kumar

The images of several prominent Muslim women being uploaded for "auction" on an app is not only an example of the penetration of the spread of hate politics but also of how a generation of bright young people is being roped in for fulfilling communal agendas.

The politics of hate is fast poisoning our society. The prime victims of such sectarian politics are the youths. The communal forces have made inroads into our engineering, technological and science institutes. As far as liberal and social sciences centres are concerned, their penetration is still limited.

It should be a great concern for us that our bright minds, which have been focused on research and the welfare of people, are being communalised. Bigotry is being preached, where science should be taught.

A good section of educated youth believe that everything in the ancient period was "Hindu" and "great" before the arrival of Muslim invaders. While polarising people on religious lines has got certain parties electoral success, the fabric of society has been strained.

At the cost of social harmony, elections are being won. And prejudice is just not confined to one section. Even educated people in the cities are often heard making sexist remarks against women from the north-eastern states, who are studying in universities or working in offices. In many places, single women are not given flats on rents as they are suspected to have "illicit" relations.

Many educated people think that women studying at JNU and other liberal spaces have a lot of boyfriends. Instead of studying, these girls party, drink, and have relationships with "innumerable men". It is not surprising that when the some goons attacked JNU students in 2016 accusing them of being "anti-national", the character assassination of JNU women students was simultaneously happening.

On social media, several pictures about sex toys and condoms, recovered from JNU girls hostels, kept floating. An MLA from a political party went on to count the numbers of cigarette butts, bones, used condoms and contraceptives used by the students in JNU.

According to his estimate, around 10,000 butts of cigarettes, 4,000 beedis, 5,000 bones, 2,000 packets of chips and namkeen and 3,000 used condoms and 500 used contraceptives had been used in JNU.

When Muslim women speak fluent Hindustani and English, fight for the rights of the most marginalised by participating in protests it threatens the patriarchal worldview of communal ideologues. It does not fit in the historical view of Muslim women in purdah who are “contentiously giving birth to “poisonous” Muslim babies.

The work of Delhi University historian Charu Gupta (Sexuality, Obscenity and Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India published by Palgrave Macmillan) is an important contribution. Her work has detailed narratives of how Hindu communal forces had approached Muslim women during the colonial period.

That is why it is important to remember that the Bulli Bai app case is not merely the issue of communal forces attacking Muslim women. It’s about all women who are disadvantaged – Dalits, Adivasis, Christians, Muslims, the poor, the uneducated.

For example, even the life of a Dalit woman is not safe in the national capital.

Similarly, Adivasi women are being targeted on the mere suspicion of being “radicals” by security forces. Working poor women are molested in rural areas. In the “disturbed” regions, the attacks on women hardly become national news. Sexual attacks on marginalised women are not being carried out because some males could not control their “passion”, or are they begot by the “seductive” behavior of women.

The acts of sexual violence are well-thought-out and part of a plan to send a “strong” message to the marginalised communities that the ruling classes and the State are mightier than one can imagine.

(Dr. Abhay Kumar is a Delhi-based independent journalist.)